

**Victimhood and State Identity:  
An Assessment of the Emotional Representation of Israel's state  
Identity in the International Arena.**

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## Abstract

*Constructivism has introduced a new perspective on International Relations (IR) which emphasizes ideational factors for the formation of state interests. Similarly, the so called 'Emotional Turn' in IR advocates for an academic assessment of emotions in international politics and how the experience of feelings like humiliation, pride, anger shapes state behavior. This research aims to contribute to the Emotional Turn by proposing an academic assessment of the expression of victimhood as a dimension of a state's identity using the case study of Israel. As IR theory is becoming more aware of ideational and emotional drivers of state action, conceptualizing victimhood in International Relations is an important endeavor. Victimhood is a social psychological concept describing a status or identity that the victim ascribes to themselves after suffering trauma. What are the emotional categories underlying a self-ascribed victimhood in Israel's identity discourse towards international community? The methodological assessment employs Emotions Discourse Analysis to identify the categories and connotations of victimhood uttered in the speeches of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu in his Annual Addresses to the UN General Assembly from 2015 to 2017. Understanding the emotional component of identity markers such as victimhood might offer policy makers new ways of reconciling ongoing conflicts and add to the ongoing debate on the impact of emotions in International Relations and discourse analysis.*

## 1. Introduction

*'The right of the Jewish People to a state in the Land of Israel does not arise from the series of disasters that befell the Jewish People over 2,000 years - persecutions, expulsions, pogroms, blood libels, murders, which reached its climax in the Holocaust, an unprecedented tragedy in the history of nations [...] The right to establish our sovereign state here, in the Land of Israel, arises from one simple fact: Eretz Israel is the birthplace of the Jewish people.'* (Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, 2009)

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu voiced in this speech at Bar Ilan University in 2009 a sentiment that many Israelis would intuitively agree with: The Jewish state of Israel earned its right to exist not by virtue of the suffering of the Jewish people throughout the millennia but purely because Israel was historically the 'homeland' of the Jewish people, and every people has the right to self-determination. However, Netanyahu did not refrain from bringing to mind the suffering and persecution that have threatened the existence of Jews throughout history – the perpetual (virtuous) victimhood of the Jewish people. The question arises: If Israel's right to exist is as simple as Netanyahu asserts, why does he feel the need to conjure up images of a violent history – especially one reaching back over 2,000 years? This form of expression has been called 'allusive victimhood', describing the act of alluding to and de-historicizing past victims in order to draw analogies for the present (Ochs 2006, 356). The reference to the past and the notion of perpetual Jewish suffering deflect attention from the state of contemporary Israel – one of the wealthiest countries in the region, a military and technology powerhouse which is involved in a 70-year-long conflict with its neighbor states over the question of Palestine. Israel has experienced victimization, but is also a perpetrator, just like many other states that have been founded in the aftermath of the call for self-determination and the founding of the United Nations after World War II. I chose to begin this thesis with Netanyahu's speech to emphasize a crucial point: Israel's understanding of the world and of itself within that world is strongly shaped by the narrative of victimhood and perpetual suffering of the Jewish people. The notion of victimhood has taken a prominent place in the Israel's state identity.

This thesis is an attempt at academically identifying and analyzing the expression of victimhood in Israel's state identity from an International Relations perspective. It

emphasizes the social construction of emotions through discursive practices within international relations and aims to show how state identity is expressed through language in the international realm (Koschut et al. 2017, 482). The research question is: *What are the emotional categories underlying Israel's expression of a victim-based identity in its presentation in front of the UN General Assembly General Debate?* While this paper focuses on Israel, the introduced concepts may be equally useful for the examination of self-ascribed state-identity of any other country.

The research is based within broader discussions on the Emotional Turn in International Relations theory, which studies the role of affect, emotions and feelings for politics in the international realm and draws on Constructivism as a theoretical framework. Constructivism is useful in this regard because of its discussion of matters of (state) identity and the mutual constitution of structures and actors in international politics. My aim is to identify the narrative or discursive expressions of a victimhood in the foreign policy of Israel, particularly as it is represented by its political elite in front of the international community.

Israel's paradoxical position, as a country that was founded in the backdrop of the genocide of the Jewish people in Europe and which, since then, has been participant in an ongoing violent conflict with its regional neighbors, provides sufficient grounds for assuming a state identity based in victimhood. Of course, identity is multi-dimensional and manifold, and in a heterogenous society every narrative is challenged by a counter-narrative. Nevertheless, democratically elected political leaders represent and shape a collective identity that is shared with a significant (if not dominant) part of the population they were appointed to represent. After introducing Constructivism and the Emotional Turn in IR as theoretical frameworks for this study, I provide an overview over the current body of literature on state identity, emotions and victimhood in IR and beyond. The subsequent analysis, based on Emotions Discourse Analysis by Koschut, will be focusing on the speeches of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in front of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) General Debate from 2015 to 2017 to assess the emotional expressions and representations that underpin Israel's self-perception as a victim of the international community (Koschut 2018b).

## 2. Constructivism & The Emotional Turn in International Relations

Constructivism focuses on knowledge and ideas about the world, rather than its material reality, and considers the interplay of structures and agents as constructive of International Relations (Wendt 1994). Constructivism, emerging in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, challenges the ontology of the actor as a static, interest-driven entity, and the notion of Structuralism that assumes the unchangeable nature of a given structure as ontologically consistent (Shannon 2012, 3). Alexander Wendt introduced the idea of symbolic interactionism and the interplay of the individual and their environment, or agent-structure relations, in IR - 'Anarchy is what the states make of it' (1999). Constructivism claims to cover the middle ground on which agent and structure influence each other, and it has introduced the debate on ideational factors that drive state behavior, beyond self-interest and maximization of benefits. Constructivism emphasizes the process of constructing reality, relationships, identities or intersubjective rules in the international realm through representation and discursive practices (Onuf 2013; Waever 1990; Hutchison 2016).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to give a comprehensive overview on all positions and streams within Constructivism. However, the core assumption of this IR approach is the rejection of essentialism about the rules of the international realm and the emphasis on analyzing and understanding the constructing narratives and intersubjective meanings that shape actions and reactions, threat perception, social realities and so on (Wendt 1999; Shannon & Kowert 2012, 13). The construction and evolution of these narratives as they pertain to state identity in particular are core subjects of conventional constructivist research, as is how an actor's view of the world is shaped by their experiences and sense of relation to a system of rules and ideas. Within the Emotional Turn, scholars have argued that Constructivism lends itself to the study of emotions due to its emphasis on intersubjectivity. Political actors are allowed to participate in world politics using a specific institutionalized meaning structure, and Constructivism highlights that socially meaningful emotions lend their relevance to learned and transferred social rules (Koschut 2013, 278). Equally a victimhood identity is learned and transmitted through social interactions and given meaning in a wider cultural framework of identification, which is why Constructivism serves as the larger theoretical framework for the analysis.

In recent years, some International Relations scholars have begun to acknowledge the role of emotive and cognitive processes for decision-making with the aim to provide clarity on the diversity of motivations, interests, objectives and drives that govern behaviors of, for example, state actors (Bleiker 2009). This Emotional Turn in International Relations supposes that states, who are managed and made by people, may demonstrate behaviors akin to those of people, who can experience humiliation, triumph or pain, who strive for power and recognition. The Emotional Turn in IR asserts that emotions, although a product of the individual within their physical body, exist on group levels as they constitute feelings of belonging and identity. Therefore they may implicate the state-level and consequently influence world politics. According to Constructivism, identities are the basis for the formation of ideas, preferences and interests of state-actors. The Emotional Turn in IR likewise is interested in what identities 'are and can do' in world politics and the behavioral implications of emotions and cognitive processes (Mattern 2014, 591). While the first wave of Emotions research in IR focused on emphasizing that emotions matter, recently the role of emotions in discourse has been studied more thoroughly and researchers have made attempts to contribute to methodological and conceptual considerations (Hutchison & Bleiker 2014; Koschut et al. 2017; Clément & Sangar 2018). As Koschut points out, studies that involve the discourse-emotion nexus have been among the most prominent contributions to emotions research in IR (2017, 483). The question these studies aim to answer is how scholars can conceptualize and extract the emotional dimension and emotionalizing effect of discourse and language in International Relations (ibid.). The study of victimhood and state identity ties into this dialogue on emotions and discourse, and the social-constructivist perspective emphasizes the intersubjective and sociocultural dimension of emotions in the international realm.

However, victimhood and identity discourses have found little attention in International Relations thus far, especially beyond research on relationships between perpetrators and victims directly, for example in the post-colonial context or in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Shnabel et al 2013). This thesis contributes to the study of victimhood as state identity in International Relations by assessing how Israel's Prime Minister evokes and reveals victimhood in his representation of the country in the Annual Address of Heads of State to the UN General Assembly.

Examining the emotional expression of victimhood identity might be significant for understanding Israel's self-perception, relations to and role within the international community and subsequently foreign policy decision making.

### 3. Literature Review

Victimization – the act of violence against a group – has been studied extensively within IR and Conflict Studies. However, victimhood as an individual's or group's understanding of their social identity has hardly ever been applied to state identity and Foreign Policy Analysis (Noor et al. 2017, 3). A victim-based collective identity can be defined as *“a mindset shared by group members that results from a perceived intentional harm with severe and lasting consequences inflicted on a collective by another group or groups, a harm that is viewed as undeserved, unjust and immoral and one that the group was not able to prevent”* (Bouchat et al. 2017, 238). To account for the different concepts merged in this thesis, the following literature review will provide an overview on research on a) state identity, b) emotions and of c) victimhood in International Relations and specifically in the case of Israel.

#### 3.1 State Identity

While the importance of identity for the social sciences has long been acknowledged, the question remains of how to operationalize a concept with little conceptual clarity, or even agreed-upon definition (Abdelal et al. 2006, 695). There are roughly two approaches to identity in International Relations, the essentialist and the constructivist understanding. The essentialist notion, famously represented by scholar Samuel Huntington, assumes identity as a historical and cultural prerequisite and precursor to action (1996). In this framework, identity does not – or hardly – change, and is the outcome of given structures. Huntington, for example, argues that ‘Western’ ideas and norms are singular and non-transferable to other cultures and civilizations as the ‘Western’ economical, societal and political structures do not exist in other regions (ibid., 311). He even says that such a transfer is potentially dangerous, as the process might weaken local and regional identities (ibid.). In the essentialist understanding, identity is independent from interaction with other identities. Even some post-structuralist approaches consider identity as a potential independent variable for the



explanation of state action (Bucher & Jasper 2017, 393; Price & Reus-Smit 1998). In these instances, state identity is often represented as an endogenous, causal process and rarely by its performative dimension (Bucher & Jasper 2017, 392).

The social constructivist notion of identity emphasizes the importance of interaction between states that foster intersubjectivity, perception, self-perception and mutual expectations (Koschut 2013, 56). Wendt differentiates between identities, what the actor is, and interests, what the actor wants, as the fundamental drivers of action (1999, 229-30). While interests describe a sort of corporate identity, eg. the need for security and predictability, social identities are multiple, depending on the relation in which they are invoked (Wendt 1994, 385). Abdelal et al. addressed the challenges of making this 'social identity' an independent variable in research, defining multiple types of social identities that are not mutually exclusive (2006, 696). Particularly 'cognitive models', describing the shared understanding of material and political conditions, and 'constitutive norms', the norms and practices that are attached to group membership, are relevant for IR scholarship (*ibid.*, 697). Their practice or performance leads to recognition of group identity – hence state identity - from within and from the outside (*ibid.*, 697). Regarding the individual subject, Hutchison points out the relevance of attachment to a political community for the existence of any form of political cohesion (Hutchison 2016, 32). Koschut summarizes the current conception of identity in IR as an inside/outside dualism (2013, 59). On the inside, identity reflects norms, values and perception and delimits the particular identity to the outside – while allowing states to invoke different nuances and dimensions depending on the relation (*ibid.*).

Another important dimension of state identity is that it is not static, but contested: Within the group, there are competing narratives, interests and understandings of its identity's contents that subject it to change over time. Because of this interplay of contents and levels of contestation, Abdelal et al. say, one arrives at an understanding of social identity that is necessarily constructivist and intersubjective (2006, 701). Nevertheless, identity is a highly controversial concept as there is not one definition or agreed-upon minimum baseline for what constitutes a state identity (Koschut 2013, 54).

### 3.2 Emotions

Emotions are credited with expressing our inner bodily feelings to others through intersubjective, linguistic devices and have only been accounted for in IR for the past decade (Hutchison 2016). Previously, notions of rational choice and judgement have been so prevalent that policy-makers and scholars alike considered emotions as a cause for misperception and wrongful decision making and emotions were framed as something external that a rational actor had to overcome or suppress (Dixon 2003, 29; Jervis 1976, 3). However, the relationship between emotions and rationality has since been questioned by IR scholars who emphasize that emotions have implications for what is deemed rational choice in and of itself and are intrinsically linked to the way that actors perceive the social structure and themselves in it as 'rational agents' (Hutchison 2018). Recent debates have shifted from the acknowledgement of the role of emotions for international politics towards methodologically operationalizing the concept – how do we evaluate and scale emotions for academic analysis (Clément & Sangar 2018, 6; Koschut 2018a; Hutchison & Bleiker 2014; Mercer 2014)? While constructivists implicitly acknowledge the role of emotions for their theoretical framework that is based on intersubjectivity and the power of language and discourse, tracing the emotions that underpin matters of identity and status in international politics raises methodological questions. According to Mercer, Emotions research in IR distinguishes between phenomenology, causality and ontology (2014, 521). Regarding the ontology and phenomenology of emotion, there has been inquiry into the differences between emotion, affect and feeling (Bleiker 2018; Hutchison & Bleiker 2014).

There are also a number of publications on the role of emotions in forming state identity and social structures in IR (Mercer 2010 & 2014; Petersen 2011; Hutchison 2016; Hutchison & Bleiker 2014) as well as on the impact of conflict and traumatic experiences on collective affect, identities emotions such as fear and hatred – and vice versa (Hutchison 2016; Ross 2014). Bleiker and Hutchison emphasize that affect and emotive responses play a role in how actors perceive the social world, a fact with undeniable weight for the study of world politics, especially when it is focusing on state identity and representation (2014, 502). Hutchison also states that emotions underpin the normative frameworks that determine how institutions and states are

allowed to act (2016). Mercer points out that emotions emerge within the structure, be it an individual, a group or a state (2018, 530). As he argues, 'feeling like a state' is connected to identification with a group and because emotions give meaning to the identity, identification is emotional (ibid. 2018, 524; Onuf 2013). Accordingly, shared emotional reactions of group members that arise from a certain level of identification constitute the affective dimension of state identity.

Discourse analysts, like Bially Mattern, acknowledge the importance of emotions for contextualizing the connection between power and language in matters of identity and status in international politics (Bially Mattern 2005; Hall 2012; Solomon 2014). Koschut tries to operationalize the socio-emotional dimension of language which, according to him, reproduces and verbalizes shared experiences in identity-specific 'emotion categories' (2018b, 497). These categories then help identify power structures and hierarchies in international relations (ibid.). Accordingly, studying the emotional component of discursive constructions of identity, power and hierarchies contributes to understanding the performative dimension of power in international politics (ibid., 498).

### 3.3 Victimhood

Victimhood describes the impact of the victimization on an individual's or group's social identity and their perceived place in the world, including inter-group relations, needs and interests between conflict parties, perspectives on other marginalized groups or experiences and attitudes towards justice (e.g., Noor et al. 2017; Rimé et al. 2015; Bouchat et al. 2017).

Scholars from a variety of academic disciplines have been contributing to the research of victimhood, challenging assumptions about it in all kinds of political, geographical and temporal contexts (Jacoby 2015, 512; Wacquant 2009). The potential political implications of collective victimhood have most recently been discussed in the 2017 Special Issue on Victimhood in the *European Journal of Social Psychology* and there are a number of interesting publications on victimhood and state identity on the domestic level (Wilke 2007; Nadler et al. 2008; Shnabel 2013; Jacoby 2015; Noor et al. 2017; Hoondert et al. 2019; Schori-Eyal et al. 2014; Klar et al. 2013).

With regards to states, Orr and Moeller both provide interesting studies of the consequences of the politics of victimhood in the cases of Japan and Germany post-World War II (Orr 2001; Moeller 1996). The 'politics of victimhood', the result of empowerment through collective expression of grief and loss, may connect individuals and perpetuate nationalist myths based on humiliation and persecution, as is the case in Serbian and Israeli nationalism (de Senarcles 2016, 178). Hutchison wrote about the collectivizing of emotions after trauma, suggesting discourse analysis as a method for identifying representations of victimhood in a political community, however, not relating it to state identity (2016, 112).

Regarding Israel, Judaism and victimhood, there have been some publications from different disciplines. Esther Benbassa wrote a critique of the historiography of Jewish suffering which was a reaction to increasing secularization of European Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, stating that suffering created a victimhood narrative which in turn has become a moral posture and identity-enhancing construct for Jews and Israelis today (Benbassa 2010; Lazaroms 2011, 621). Benbassa argues that, although suffering is ingrained in Jewish liturgy from the Old Testament onwards and ritualized through various religious holidays, the dominance of the Holocaust in commemorative practice in Israel has shifted the identity primacy to a Jewish suffering devoid of positive affirmation. She asks how an identity of loss, suffering and victimhood can be sustainable – especially considering that Holocaust remembrance seems to provide a major rationale for contemporary Israeli identity (Benbassa 2010, 132). Anthropologist Juliana Ochs describes how the notion of perpetual Jewish suffering impacts Israel's role in and perspective on the international community, pointing out the perceived synchronicity of historical events attached to that notion (Ochs 2006, 357). Ochs discovers that discourses of Jewish Israeli terror victims during the Second Intifada were modeled after those of Holocaust victims. She emphasizes the tendency to 'synchronize' or commensurate past and present victims, with reference to the Holocaust giving meaning to present victims of terror, regardless of the different historical contexts (ibid.).

In a recent edited volume about victimhood discourses in contemporary Israel, Yael Aronoff writes that Israeli leaders vary in their commitment to the victimhood discourse depending on how emotionally tied they are to a past that frames their perception of the continuous victimization, while Dennis Ross states in the same

volume that the current Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in particular expresses the constant need to safeguard Israel from enemies all around (Peleg 2019, 7-23). While this publication offers compelling insights into the state and history of Israel's victimhood discourse, the question of how this affects Israel's representation in the international community has not been systematically addressed yet. This thesis focuses on the notion of victimhood as one dimension of Israel's state identity.

As this brief review demonstrates, efforts have been made to understand effects of emotions on state identity and the experience of victimhood on individuals, groups and intergroup relations between perpetrator and victim. Additionally, there are reflections on the role of suffering and occurrence of victimhood in relation to Jewish identity and contemporary Israel from all sorts of academic disciplines. However, there is little strategic assessment into how those experiences impact the diplomatic endeavors and foreign relations of the state. The methodological assessment of the expression of victimhood as state identity, especially in the case of Israel, in front of the international community will provide an important addition to this body of literature on the identity-emotions nexus in constructivist IR research. The aim is to contribute to the exploration of the discursive dimension of emotions and identity in the international realm, not in bilateral relations, but in the forum of the UNGA General Debate. In order to operationalize the concepts introduced in the Literature Review for the analysis, the following chapter outlines Emotions Discourse Analysis as a method for examining political speeches as texts of the identity discourse and assessing the emotional categories, expressions and representations that underpin these texts (Koschut 2018b). The chapter also contains an overview of discourse analysis as a research method in IR and considerations on scope and limitations of this study.

#### 4. Methodology

As Mythen says, 'becoming a victim (...) involves being party in a range of interactions and processes, including identification, labelling and recognition' (2007, 466). As these processes indicate, identification with and expression of victimhood is done via speech and communication. Because victimhood is a discursive practice, I take a discourse analytical approach in order to locate the emotional expressions and

connotations of Israel's self-representation. This thesis is a single case study, or within-case analysis. A 'case' is often described as one instance of a collection of events that are interesting to the interpreter, for example an 'instance of civil wars' (Bennett 2004, 28f.). In this research, the 'case' consists of an instance of speeches that were held in the same forum in three consecutive years. The underlying assumption is that Israel's head of state is expressing or performing Israeli state identity as his administration perceives it in the international forum of the Annual Address at the UN General Assembly. On a methodological level, the question is, how a certain characteristic or feature of this identity, namely victimhood, can be deduced via the analysis of what is said, and how it is said, in these speeches (Koschut 2013, 58). While victimhood is a status, not an emotion, I assume that it is communicated via emotion words, analogies, metaphors or connotations.

#### 4.1 Emotions Discourse Analysis

According to discourse analysis, the world is constituted by how we speak, what we speak and do not speak about – not limited to verbal communication. It focuses on the relationship between social reality, representation, narrative and discourse and puts a strong emphasis on power relations (Hutchison 2016, 114). Discourses limit the 'thinkable', setting the boundaries for what is possible. Their analysis is meant to draw attention to the underlying power dynamics of how discourses construct and maintain social relations (Solomon 2017, 499).

Studying the expression of identity through discourse analysis assumes that language contains an affective dimension which has to be analytically identified within the political discourse (Koschut 2018a, 278). In this research, I therefore map the emotional expressions that underpin the presentation of Israel's position and perspective on world politics as voiced by its Prime Minister Netanyahu at the Annual Addresses of Heads of State in front of the United Nations General Assembly. The task is to identify emotional expressions that represent an experience of victimhood and analytically structure these expressions in a meaningful way to glean insights into Israel's self-ascribed identity (ibid., 292). Therefore, I am going to employ what Koschut calls 'Emotions Discourse Analysis' which follows three steps: a. selecting a text produced by an actor with appropriate authority to be considered a representative

of some sort of emotional canon, b. searching for emotions explicitly or implicitly expressed in the text and c. studying how the text may be received by its audience (2018a, 282-286).

According to the first step of Emotion discourse analysis, the speaker has to be deemed sufficiently charismatic or authorized to express the emotions of the group he or she is meant to represent in the analysis. As Paul Brass puts it, elites and counter-elites shape the process of self-identification and the world view of a group and use them to mobilize parts of said group (1991, 75). Without marginalizing the importance of bottom-up construction of identity, I assert that political elites hold the power to elevate certain aspects of a group's culture and narratives and to attach value to events or characteristics within the public discourse.

As this thesis will analyze prepared speeches, I additionally draw on Epstein's approach to discourse analysis which focuses on agency (what the actor says) and the construction of interests in international politics (what the actor achieves). This is helpful in order to avoid the essentializing of a 'self' or identity instead of acknowledging the multi-dimensionality of identity and the agentive capacity of the actor in their representation (Epstein 2010, 365). It is necessary to emphasize Netanyahu's role as a speaker in front of a specific audience to account for not only the purely affective emotional dimension of his speeches, but also the potentially intentional employment of emotion categories to further his political interests (Bucher & Jasper 2017, 398).

Chapter five provides an overview on the contemporary victimhood discourse in Israel and biographical information about Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, the speaker, accounting for the first step of the analysis. In the second step of the analysis, I identify and cluster references to notions constitutive of a victimhood narrative in Netanyahu's speeches and map the emotional potential of the components. This means not only assessing what is said but also which underlying emotional connotations signify an expression of victimhood within the phrase (Koschut 2018a, 282). In the third step, the potential emotional reactions of the audience to the text are acknowledged (*ibid.*, 285). Because there is not always a clear distinction between the two, steps two and three are done conjointly within the analysis which is instead organized along three overarching themes of the speeches.

## 4.2 Some Limitations

Due to the scope of this thesis, the research will cover three recurring themes identified in the UNGA speeches of Netanyahu: Israel's relation to the UN, its perception of Iran and militant Islam and its representation of history and Jewish identity. This is not an exhaustive assessment of all dimensions and relations that are mentioned in the speeches. Secondly, in this paper, victim-based identity is considered the result of institutional political discourses motivated by hegemonic interests within Israel (top-down) and the shared experience of events with relevance to Israeli identity, religious, social and historical (Clément & Sangar 2018, 18). The speaker, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, has held the office continuously since 2009, simultaneously serving as the Foreign Minister of Israel in 2013 as well as from 2015 to 2019 until the Knesset elections in April 2019. While he does not represent the entirety of the Israeli population, I assume that he is a representative of a, if not the, dominant discourse of Israeli state identity and has, as a member of the political elite, significantly contributed to shaping this discourse. Additionally, I do not make assumptions on whether the expression of victimhood by Prime Minister Netanyahu is strategic or affective as this dichotomy does not serve the purpose of answering the research question.

Regarding the transferability of the results to other case studies, I assume that the method and underlying assumptions of the emotions-discourse nexus in victim-based state identity can be employed for assessing different states and the way that they represent themselves in the international arena. However, the points of reference, metaphors and analogies evoking victimhood will vary depending on the case study. For example, historical Jewish suffering or the Holocaust are unlikely points of reference for a speech given by the Prime Minister of South Africa.

## 5. Historical overview

Discourse analysis is the 'qualitative contextualization of texts and practices in order to describe a social meaning' (Abdelal et al. 2006, 702). It deals with the relational content of identity as it is expressed through linguistic practices and, in this case, also with affective or emotional content. The contextualization of the speeches requires an



understanding of who is speaking to whom about what. Therefore, the following paragraphs contain a historical overview on the Israeli victimhood discourse and on Netanyahu as a political and public figure.

According to Moshe Berent, Zionism originally had the aim to establish a nation-state for the Jewish people to eradicate their victimization and defend themselves from persecution (2019, 16). Israel was ultimately founded as an independent state in the immediate aftermath of the systematic extinction of Europe's Jewish population during World War II. But many of its Jewish inhabitants had already arrived during the early Zionist settlements from 1871 onwards and the early settlers had little respect for the Holocaust survivors who experienced rejection and were forced to suppress their experiences upon arrival in Israel (*ibid.*, 16-18). Yehuda Bacon describes that he and other Holocaust survivors were considered weak and embarrassing as they did not fit in the narrative of the resilient settlers of the Jewish homeland dominant among early Zionists (2015). He states that only the public trial of Adolf Eichmann, one of the architects of the Holocaust, in Jerusalem in 1961 changed public perception of Holocaust survivors in Israel. During the trial, which was broadcast to the entire country, survivors were given the chance to speak of their experiences (2015). The Eichmann trial and the Six-Day-War in 1967 made the continued threat of victimization more apparent and the victimhood narrative started to gain prominence in Israelis' world view (Peleg 2019, 5).

Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's current Prime Minister, was born in Israel but raised and educated in the United States, before moving back to Israel in 1967 – just after the Six-Day-War - to volunteer in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), where he became team leader of the Sayeret Matkal special forces unit (Remnick 2013). Netanyahu took part in several military operations, including the rescue of hostages during the hijacking of Sabena flight 571 by a Palestinian terror group in 1972. His older brother Yonathan was killed in action at age 31 during Operation Entebbe, the hostage-rescue of an Air France flight also kidnapped by Palestinian terrorists in 1976 (State of Israel 2008). From 1984-88, Netanyahu served as the Israeli ambassador to the UN General Assembly, before becoming the head of the socially and economically conservative Israeli Likud party in 1993, a party which perceives the world as seeking the destruction of Israel (Peleg 2019). He was elected Prime Minister for the first time in 1996 to 1999, served as Finance Minister from 2003 to 2005, was reelected head of Likud

party in 2007 and has again served as Israeli Prime Minister from 2009 onwards. At present, Netanyahu has managed to preserve his position as PM while being indicted on charges of bribery and fraud (Reuters 2020).

The degree to which Israeli prime ministers, including Netanyahu, have drawn upon the victimhood discourse domestically has been linked to their biography and ideology (Aronoff 2014, 38). Netanyahu's biography is intertwined with modern Israeli history and he has a tendency to conflate his person with the state. The death of his brother in combat has made him less inclined to seek communication with the Palestinians, whom he perceives as supporting terrorism (ibid.). According to former US envoy to Israel Dennis Ross, Netanyahu sees the world as filled with enemies and that 'Israel has to constantly look over her shoulder because it is constantly being threatened' (Aronoff 2014, 48). Like many Israelis, he considers the UN as an organ that disproportionately targets and punishes Israel with critique and resolutions (Aronoff 2018, 37).

Every year on the third weekend of September, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) opens its Regular Session. On this weekend, the heads of state of all UN members have the opportunity to give a 15-minute speech contributing to the so-called General Debate. This event is generally less about policy and more about the countries' representatives positioning themselves, issuing criticism and emphasizing their priorities moving forward. The General Debate is one of the few UNGA-related events throughout the year that raises broader public interest and is usually highly publicized. The audience is therefore not limited to the UNGA representatives that are gathered in the room, but also other Heads of State and, importantly, a broader civilian public within Israel and around the world.

## 6. Analysis

The last paragraph highlighted the historical development of a victim-based identity in contemporary Israel and provided a general overview on Netanyahu's political career and world view. The following analysis explores how Israel's self-perception and sense of place within the international community is expressed by Netanyahu. Among others, the phrases 'negative/positive emotional coding [...]' and 'direct/indirect emotional expression [...]' are used to qualify and explain the

emotional components of the text (Koschut 2018b, 510-14). The two phrases were introduced by Koschut to inform emotions-based discourse analysis and have been adapted in this thesis because of their simplicity and clarity (ibid.).

The analysis is structured along two parts: Firstly, general discourse analytical reflections and observations regarding the speeches, and secondly, the identification and interpretation of emotive and emotionalizing expressions, phrases and metaphors in Netanyahu's speeches that indicate feelings of victimhood and victimization according to emotions discourse analysis. Since three themes play a prominent role in all three speeches, the latter part is organized according to these themes: **a)** Israel's victimhood in front of the UN, **b)** Iran and militant Islam as vital threats to Israel's existence and **c)** the interpretation of Israel's history as an extension of Jewish history and liturgy and especially perpetual Jewish suffering. Three consecutive and fairly recent speeches have been chosen in order to maintain the relevance of this research and to highlight the recurrence of the above-mentioned themes.

### 6.1 General reflections

All three speeches are structured in a similar manner: They begin with an overview on Israel's technological and agricultural achievements or a claim to mistreatment of Israel by the UN and its different organs. Then they move on to lay out either the threat of Iran's possible acquisition of nuclear weapons or the unwillingness of the Palestinian Authority to negotiate a final status agreement on the Middle East conflict, pointing out the threat of militant Islam to peace in the region and worldwide. Lastly, every speech contains references to the resilience of the Jewish people and the eventual realization of Israel's assets for the international community. Already in this brief retelling, one can see the potential expression of a victim-based identity and the themes according to which the analysis is structured become more apparent. But before exploring the emotional expressions and codes that signify a sense of victimhood in Netanyahu's annual speeches, a general reflection on some recurring linguistic and rhetoric strategies is helpful.

Netanyahu continually engages in what Yovel calls 'the language of the multitude' or, simply, doublespeak (1992, 8). Doublespeak is a linguistic strategy that intentionally leaves something hidden for the hearer to figure out for themselves.

Because it requires a lot of context knowledge, only an 'insider' will be able to identify the intentional ambiguity in the speaker's allusion (Bartsch 1994, 67). The following quote emphasizes the strategy of deliberate ambiguity with which Netanyahu coats his acknowledgement of final status issues in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations:

*,[...] This conflict rages because for the Palestinians, the real settlements they're after are Haifa, Jaffa and Tel Aviv [framing of Palestinians as dishonest]. Now mind you [expression meant to soften the controversy of the argument], the issue of settlements is a real one [directly contradicting statement from the first sentence] and it can and must be resolved in final status negotiations. [...]' (2016)*

Similarly, Netanyahu's framing of the issue of Israeli settlements in the West Bank in final status negotiations is deliberately ambiguous. Instead of fully acknowledging the reasonable criticism of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Netanyahu claims that the PA is leading a proxy-argument but ultimately wants to set an end to the Israeli state. To the UNGA audience, this signifies that Israel is willing (good) and the PA unwilling (bad) to negotiate because the PA does not accept the basic premise of a negotiation. To his Israeli audience however, this statement signals that Netanyahu does not intend to stop the expansion of settlement in the West Bank, and that the settlements are as much a part of Israel's urban space as are Haifa, Jaffa and Tel Aviv.<sup>1</sup>

Netanyahu also frequently uses sarcasm to express anger and frustration with the, according to him, malicious treatment of Israel by the UN:

*,So here's a novel idea for the United Nations [indirect expression of frustration through sarcasm]: Instead of continuing the shameful routine [negative emotional coding of regularity; projection of shame] of bashing Israel [negative emotional coding of Israel's treatment], stand with Israel.' (2015)*

*,I've heard that penguins are also enthusiastic supporters of Israel [sarcasm as indirect emotional expression of sense of absurdity]. You laugh, but penguins have no difficulty recognizing that some things are black and white [intensification of emotional expression through metaphor], are right and wrong [further intensification of emotional expression through explanation of metaphor].' (2017)*

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<sup>1</sup> The quote given in the very beginning of the thesis serves as an apt example for Netanyahu's doublespeak: He is emphasizing the Jewish people's historic claim to the land of Israel while simultaneously denying that history is a valid argument for such a claim.

,[...] you can read about that in a somewhat weightier publication – *it's called the Bible. I highly recommend it* [indirect expression of frustration through sarcasm].'  
(2017)

According to Koschut, sarcasm is an 'indirect emotional expression' of anger or resentment (2018b, 512). Subsequently, Netanyahu's use of sarcasm points to a negative emotional relationship towards the UN and his willingness to provoke the audience is supposed to signify strength and independence from the UN framework.

The biographical overview in 4.3 hinted at the emotionalized nature of Netanyahu's self-perception as Israel's Prime Minister. Two quotes in the speeches from 2015 and 2016 emphasize the emotional construction of a shared fate or identity Netanyahu ascribes to himself and to Israel:

*,Israelis know the price of war. I know the price of war* [emphasis on depth of his connection to Israel; reinforcement of claim to speak for Israel].

*I was nearly killed in battle. I lost many friends. I lost my beloved brother Yoni.* [creation sympathy; expression of willingness to risk and sacrifice].'  
(2015)

*,Israel is ready, I am ready* [emotional expression of connectivity between speaker and Israel; reinforcement of claim to speak for Israel] to negotiate all final status issues [...].'  
(2016)

The emotional undergirding of Netanyahu's representation of Israel is an important reason for why Emotions Discourse Analysis is the chosen method in this thesis. Aronoff states that Netanyahu has a tendency to lean into the victimhood discourse domestically, which makes it likely that he does so as well in the international arena (2018). Netanyahu's perception of Israel's status in the international hierarchy is likely intensified by his personal experience as ambassador to the General Assembly in the 1980's. While the doublespeak indicates a nuanced and multi-leveled text and subtext within the speeches, the use of sarcasm and the emphasis on personal sacrifice point to a highly emotionalized relationship of Israel and Netanyahu towards the UNGA arena. Accordingly, emotions discourse analysis serves as the appropriate methodology for assessing the speeches moving forward.

## 6.2 Analysis of Emotional expressions of Victimhood

The aim of the following chapter is to identify the emotionalizing and emotive categories and connotations that represent Israel's identity in front of the UNGA and

how those implicitly or explicitly express a victimhood identity. It is ordered according to three recurring themes, **a)** Israel's victimhood in front of the UN, **b)** Iran and militant Islam as vital threats to Israel's existence and **c)** the interpretation of Israel's history as an extension of Jewish history and liturgy and especially perpetual Jewish suffering. The themes are helpful insofar as they structure the amount of text that is contained in the three speeches and they allow the deliberate exclusion of parts of the text, which is necessary considering the scope of the thesis. They are, however, not exhaustive. For instance, the analysis of the emotional coding of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict could easily provide enough material for an entirely separate paper. However, the three themes as mentioned above will guide a detailed assessment of emotional categories and structures that represent a sense of victimhood in front of the international community.

a) Israel's victimhood in front of the UN

The 2015 speech opens with a reflection on Israel's position within the UNGA:

'Then as now<sup>2</sup>, the UN was *obsessively hostile* [indirect emotional expression of unfair treatment] towards Israel, the *one true democracy in the Middle East* [indirect expression of feeling of superiority]. Then as now, some *sought to deny the one and only Jewish state a place among the nations* [indirect emotional expression of unfair treatment]. [...] I ended that first speech by saying: Gentlemen, check your *fanaticism* [direct emotional expression of feeling of hostility] at the door.' (2015)

Emotionally, the opening paragraph signifies the long period of time that Israel has been feeling a lack of acceptance and hostility from the international community. The ending of the speech mirrors these sentiments by repeating the structure and emotional representations of the first paragraph:

'So here's a *novel idea for the United Nations* [indirect emotional expression of impatience through sarcasm]: Instead of continuing the *shameful routine of bashing Israel* [multiple indirect expressions of unfair treatment], *stand with Israel* [direct emotional expression of hope for solidarity].' (2015)

The 2016 speech contains more explicit allusions to the perceived hostility of the UN towards Israel, extended to include several UN organs:

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<sup>2</sup> ,Then' referring to Netanyahu's administration as Israel's ambassador to the UNGA in 1984.

'[...] year after year I've stood at this very podium and *slammed the UN* [acknowledgement of emotional state] for its *obsessive bias* against Israel [multiple projections of unfair treatment]. And the UN *deserved every scathing word* – for the *disgrace* [repeated use of direct negative emotional category] of the General Assembly that last year passed 20 resolutions against the democratic State of Israel and a grand total of three resolutions against all the other countries *on the planet* [emotional expression emphasizing scale].

And what about the joke called the UN Human Rights Council, which each year condemns Israel more than all the countries of the world combined. As women are being systematically *raped, murdered, sold into slavery across the world* [projection of backwardness through negative emotional coding], which is the only country that the UN's Commission on Women chose to condemn this year? *Yep, you guessed it – Israel* [indirect emotional expression of annoyance through sarcasm]. Israel. Israel *where women fly fighter jets, lead major corporations, head universities, preside – twice – over the Supreme Court, and have served as Speaker of the Knesset and Prime Minister* [projection of progressivism through positive emotional coding].

And this *circus* [negative emotional coding through metaphor of unprofessionalism] continues at UNESCO. [...] *Now, this is hard to believe* [acknowledgement of conscious feeling state] but UNESCO just *denied the 4,000-year connection between the Jewish people and its holiest site, the Temple Mount* [indirect emotional expression of injustice by emphasis on heritage]. *That's just as absurd as denying the connection between the Great Wall of China and China* [intensification of negative emotional coding by means of comparison].'

According to these paragraphs, Israel feels victimized by the UN, as is reflected by the frequent use of the emotional categories of injustice, hostility and unfair treatment. Examples of different UN bodies mistreating Israel are listed and underlined with a comparison to emphasize the absurdity of the perceived scolding of Israel.

*,Are the half million slaughtered Syrians* [negative emotional coding of disgust] helped by your condemnation of Israel? The same Israel that has treated thousands of injured Syrians *in our hospitals* [emotional expression of pride in selfless help] [...].

Are the *gays hanging from cranes in Iran* [projection of shame through emotional expression of disgust] helped by *your denigration of Israel* [projection of shame through scolding of false priorities of UN]? That same *Israel where gays march proudly in our streets and serve in our parliament* [intensification of negative emotional coding of Iran through contrast], including *I'm proud to say in my own Likud party* [acknowledgement of feeling of pride].' (2016)

Netanyahu points out the, according to him, real breaches of basic human rights and exploitation of state power by Iran and Syria, contrasting them with Israel's achievements in equality and medicine. Israel is framed as progressive and liberal, ergo as a part of the international community, while Syria and Iran are framed as barbaric and illiberal. The emotional categories of shame and pride are used to emphasize the unfairness of the UN's categorization of Israel as a 'bad' member of the international community. Netanyahu, then, alleges a UN-conspiracy against Israel and states Israel's independence from the UN framework:

*'I know there is talk about *ganging up on Israel* [expression of feeling of betrayal] at the UN later this year. Given its *history of hostility towards Israel* [indirect emotional expression of mistrust], does anyone really believe that Israel *will let the UN determine our security and our vital national interests* [emotional expression of contrast/independence from UN]?' (2016)*

By mentioning the alleged 'gang-up', Netanyahu projects shame onto the audience. He is indicating that the victimization of Israel by the UN, mainly through hostility and degradation, has made the UN a threat to Israel's security, hereby justifying the rejection of UN demands towards Israel.

In 2017, Netanyahu detects a positive shift in nations' attitudes towards Israel – however asserting that the UN representatives have not yet caught up with this new rise of Israel's status among the international community:

*'After 70 years, the world is embracing Israel, and Israel is embracing the world [positive emotional expression of communion/cooperation]. [...] Unfortunately [acknowledgement of negative feeling], when it comes to UN decisions about Israel, that simple recognition is too often absent. It was absent last December when the Security Council passed an anti-Israel resolution that set back the cause of peace [negative emotional connotation of UN action as counter-productive]. It was absent last May, when the World Health Organization adopted [...] a Syrian-sponsored resolution that criticized Israel for health conditions on the Golan Heights. [...] I mean, this is *preposterous* [emotional expression of feeling of anger]. *Syria has barrel bombed, starved, gassed and murdered hundreds of thousands of its own citizens and wounded millions more* [projection of shame and disgust], *while Israel has provided lifesaving medical care to thousands of Syrian victims of that very same carnage* [emotionally underlined construction of us vs. them; expression of pride and superiority]. [...]*



Again, Israel contrasts itself as a progressive, liberal, polite member of the international community with the barbaric, violent Syria, expressing frustration and anger at the sanctioning of Israel by the UN. Israel's feelings of anger toward not being recognized in its heritage and identity are further expressed in the following paragraph:

*'So is there no limit to the UN's absurdities when it comes to Israel [direct categorization of negative emotion; intensification of negativity through rhetorical question]? Well, apparently not, because in July, UNESCO declared the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron a Palestinian World Heritage site. That's worse than fake news [negative emotional expression of outrage]. That's fake history [projection of shame by means of negative emotional coding].'* (2017)

*'[...] Mr. Secretary General, I very much appreciate [acknowledgement of positive feeling state] your statement that denying Israel's right to exist is anti-Semitism, pure and simple. Now, that's important, because for too long the epicenter of global anti-Semitism has been right here at the UN [projection of shame towards UN; strong emotionally coded accusation].'* (2017)

Israel is accusing the UN of denying its right to exist, proven by the numerous perceived injustices of UN bodies perpetrated against Israel's integrity, history and identity.

The direct and indirect emotional expressions found in Netanyahu's representation of Israel's relation to the UN General Assembly and other UN organs is mostly negative, indicating feelings of anger and annoyance and a sense of unfair treatment throughout all speeches. Israel feels misunderstood and misrecognized in its identity as a member of the international community. The victimhood that Israel reflects here is related to its low status and lack of recognition by the UN: Netanyahu expresses the status-confirming emotion of pride in Israel's innovative capacity, its moral superiority and provision of humanitarian aid, its democratic constitution and equal treatment of women, contrasting these qualities with the 'backwardness' of other states in the Middle East that harm their own citizens. Rhetorically, therefore, Israel is placed on the 'good' side, or in-group of the international community, while Syria and Iran are framed as 'bad', or outside the international community. He locates the unfair treatment of Israel in its being singled out and 'scolded' by UN organs, while the 'bad', or outside-, countries are not. The emphasis on emotion words like *obsession* and *fanaticism*, juxtaposed with arguments for Israel's moral superiority, point to the state's

feeling of unfair treatment by the UN, that is lacking any rational or logical explanation – rather it is framed as purely ideological. Israel expresses annoyance at the lack of recognition and low hierarchical position through sarcasm, although it could potentially insult or aggravate audience members. The sarcastic remarks indicate a lack of threat perception, as Israel does not seem scared from potentially causing harm to its standing at the UN. Israel identifies itself as a victim of ideological bias and hostility at the UN and chooses to position itself as an independent outsider.

#### b) The Representation of Iran as a vital threat to Israel's Existence

The emotional representations surrounding the threat of Iran and militant Islam indicate a higher level of threat perception and a different experience of victimhood. In 2015, the so-called nuclear deal, or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), with Iran, which had been ratified by all parties in July of the same year, played a significant role in Israel's speech. Netanyahu repeatedly emphasized the danger of lifting economic sanctions placed on Iran that, from his perspective, would contribute to an increased threat of violent conflict in the Middle East:

*Iran aided Hamas and Islamic Jihad in building armed drones in Gaza. Iran also made clear its plans to open two new terror fronts against Israel [expression of fear of victimization] [...]. Now just imagine what Iran will do after those sanctions are lifted [emotionalization by conjuring up of imaginative escalation]. Unleashed and un-muzzled [negative emotional coding through multiple predatory analogies], Iran will go on the prowl, devouring more and more prey [intensification of negative emotional coding of Iran as predatory and animalistic].'* (2015)

Iran is represented as a predatory wild animal, the main sponsor of terrorism in the region, that is barely contained by the economic sanctions placed on it by the international community. Netanyahu feels that the lifting of these sanctions via the JCPOA will 'unleash the beast', will allow Iran to focus more resources on threatening Israel's existence.

Netanyahu emphasizes his rhetorical claims to Iran's malevolence by citing Iran's leadership:

*'Last month, Khamenei once again made his genocidal intentions [direct negative emotional coding] clear before Iran's top clerical body, the Assembly of Experts. [...] He pledged, "there will be no Israel in 25 years". Seventy years after the murder of six million Jews [negative emotional coding by means of historical*

comparison], Iran's rulers promise to *destroy my country* [acknowledgement of conscious feeling of personal attack]. *Murder my people* [intensification of previous negative emotional coding]. And the response from this body, the response from nearly every one of the governments represented here has been *absolutely nothing* [projection of feeling of shame].' (2015)

Netanyahu compares Iran's aggression towards Israel today with Nazi-Germany's genocide of six million Jews, thereby drawing an analogy between the appeasement policy of Great Britain towards the German NSDAP in the 1930's and the perceived leniency now practiced by the international community towards Iran. This analogy emotionalizes the audience, projecting feelings of guilt and shame and reminding of the failures of international diplomacy in the face of a dictatorial regime that led to the Holocaust. On the other hand, the sentence reveals the emotional connotation of the Iranian threat towards Israel and the desperation for recognition of said threat, indicating a real sense of urgency on the side of Israel. The state feels pressured to use a powerful analogy of historical victimhood of the Jews in order to attain recognition for the potential victimhood of Israel. Israel seems to feel isolated and left alone in its confrontation with a genocidal enemy. Netanyahu also continuously emphasizes that the JCPOA and the leniency of the international community towards Iran are potentially exacerbating the threat posed to Israel's existence:

'The vast majority of Israelis believe that this nuclear deal with Iran is *a very bad deal* [conscious negative feeling state]. And what makes matters *even worse* [intensification of negative emotions] is that we see a world *celebrating this bad deal* [negative emotional coding of both deal and its celebration; expression of disappointment], *rushing to embrace and do business* [indirect negative connotation of disappointment] with a regime *openly committed to our destruction* [explicit emotional expression of fear of genocide]. [...]  
*If Iran's rulers were working to destroy your countries, perhaps you'd be less enthusiastic about the deal* [indirect projection of shame and lack of empathy through sarcasm]. *If Iran's terror proxies were firing thousands of rockets at your cities, perhaps you'd be more measured in your praise* [intensification of previous sentence]. [...].'

Netanyahu expresses a lack of trust in the UNGA countries' ability to contain Iran. He appeals to the assembly to open their eyes to the global threat of Iran's aggression and to stop enabling Iran's genocidal endeavors towards Israel. This is emotionally connotated with disappointment and shame, indirectly accusing the international

community of economic opportunism and short-sightedness. In this paragraph, Israel also talks about 'Iran's terror proxies', which are elaborated upon in the following section:

,Israel will continue to *respond forcefully* [emotional connotation of power and pride] to *any attacks against it from Syria* [direct expression of potential victimization]. Israel will *continue to act to prevent the transfer of strategic weapons* [positive emotional coding of foreign intervention as self-defense: *act to prevent*] to Hezbollah from and through Syrian territory.' (2015)

Here, Syria and Hezbollah, a political party and terror organization in Lebanon, are identified as seeking to cause harm to Israel. Throughout the speeches, the cooperation of militant Islam is framed as a vital threat to Israel's existence, Iran being the supplier of money and weapons, smuggled through Syria to Lebanon or Gaza. The phrase 'act to prevent' is used to justify any military action against Syria and Lebanon, even the violation of territorial sovereignty, as an act of self-defense. With pride, Netanyahu emphasizes Israel capacity to defend itself as a powerful agent that is protecting itself from victimization.

In 2016, Israel again points out the malicious threat of militant Islam to peace and prosperity in Israel and across the globe:

'Israel fights *this fateful battle* [spiritual elation of conflict as shared fate] against the forces of *militant Islam* [emotional connotation of these forces as religious extremists] every day. We keep our borders safe from ISIS, we prevent the smuggling of game-changing weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon, we thwart Palestinian terror attacks in Judea and Samaria, the West Bank, and we deter missile attacks from Hamas-controlled Gaza. [...]' (2016)

Netanyahu rhetorically frames vastly different political and ideological actors under one umbrella term, 'militant Islam'. The emphasis on their militancy frames all these actors as extremist terrorists that cannot be confronted in a peaceful debate process and suggests that their ideology blinds them with hatred towards Israel and the secular liberal world order. This conflation has two emotionalizing intentions: The audience is supposed to agree with the conflation, as Israel positions itself as experienced and knowledgeable in dealing with these forces; and the audience is supposed to forget that these actors and their political projects and power vastly differ. In the context of terror attacks perpetrated by affiliates of the Islamic State in late 2015 and 2016, especially in Europe, framing both the political project of ISIS, an Islamist

terror organization, and of Palestinians in the West Bank as ultimately one and the same is meant to create sympathy for Israel and weaken the respect of the international community for the Palestinian perspective in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In 2016, Israel also identifies Iran as the most vital threat to its existence and emphasizes the danger it poses to the international community:

*,The greatest threat to my country, to our region, and ultimately to our world [construction of us versus them narrative; positioning Israel on the side of the international community] remains the militant Islamic regime of Iran [negative emotional coding of Iran as religious extremist]. Iran openly seeks Israel's annihilation [direct categorization as genocidal]. It threatens countries across the Middle East, it sponsors terror worldwide [direct categorization as global threat].'*

*'The threat Iran poses to all of us [emotional coding of in-group and out-group] is not behind us, it's before us. In the coming years, there must be a sustained and united effort to push back against Iran's aggression and Iran's terror [intensified negative emotional coding through repetition]. [...]*

*I am filled with hope [acknowledgement of feeling] because Israel is capable of defending itself by itself [positive coding of independence and pride] against any threat.' (2016)*

Here, Netanyahu is appealing to the audience, emphasizing the threat Iran poses not only to Israel but to international peace and creating a narrative of 'us versus them' - those who abide by the liberal order and fight terrorism and militant Islam and those who threaten this order and sponsor terrorism. Because of the sensitization of the international community to Islamist terror in 2015 and '16 due to the IS, Israel does not feel like it needs to convince the audience of the malicious intent of Islamic extremism anymore, as Netanyahu had tried to do in 2015. Instead, this year, Netanyahu tries to emotionalize his audience towards seeing Iran and IS as driven by the same force of incorrigible extremism and enemy of international peace, something that, in his view, Israel has been aware to all along. Iran is frequently represented as terroristic, implying unpredictability and illegality. Israel identifies as the virtuous and righteous self-defending actor that is fighting its victimization by a rogue enemy. Netanyahu attempts to emotionalize the international community to join Israel's cause, emphasizing Iran's threat to 'all of us', while maintaining his pride in the country's independence from the approval and assistance of the international community.

In 2017, Netanyahu takes the opportunity of the UNGA General Debate arena to directly address Iran's leadership:

'Today I have a simple message for Ayatollah Khamenei, the dictator of Iran: *The light of Israel will never be extinguished* [emotional coding through biblical reference]. נצה ישראל לא ישקר. [...] *Those who threaten us with annihilation put themselves in mortal peril* [emotional coding of us versus them; expression of pride in strength to confront threat]. Israel will defend itself with the *full force of our arms and the full power of our convictions* [expression of pride and moral superiority].'

The citation of bible verse Samuel 21:17 ties Iran's threat to the State of Israel to Jewish liturgy, it serves both as a demand and as a prophecy: The quote is supposed to justify an aggressive policy towards Iran as in the service of God while the prophetic connotation of fate one can find in the quote implies that Israel will ultimately overcome any adversities it is presented with. Religious quotations are some of the most highly emotionalized texts for those who subscribe their interpretation. The framing of, first of all, Israeli action against Iran as self-defense and, secondly, this self-defense as religious duty points to a very emotionalized relationship towards the threat of victimization presented by Iran as one of the many challenges that the Jewish people had to suffer from throughout its history. Israel presents itself as stronger and morally superior to Iran. The paragraph invokes strength and almost sounds like an invitation to fight.

Like in 2016, Netanyahu frames Syria and Lebanon as Iranian proxies against Israel:

'We will *act to prevent* [positive emotional coding as self-defense] Iran from establishing permanent military bases in Syria for its air, sea and ground forces. We will *act to prevent* [see previous bracket] Iran from producing deadly weapons in Syria or in Lebanon for use against us. And we will *act to prevent* [see previous bracket] Iran from opening new terror fronts against Israel along our northern border. As long as Iran's regime seeks the destruction of Israel, Iran will face no *fiercer enemy* [positive emotional representation] than Israel.' (2017)

The repeated use of the phrase 'act to prevent' again positions Israel as an active participant in the conflict with Iran. The potential violation of international norms is justified via its coding as self-defense and the frequent representation of 'us versus our enemies' indicates a black-and-white understanding of regional politics. Israel represents itself as surrounded by the genocidal enemy Iran; Syria and Lebanon are

represented as proxies for Iranian aggression towards Israel. Unlike the victimization through unfair treatment that Israel encounters with different UN organs, Israel seems to feel an existential threat emanating from the Islamic Republic and states the clear intent to defend itself, to refuse becoming a victim.

The emotions expressed in the context of Iran and militant Islam are more intense and confrontative than those surrounding the UN. Defensiveness and a 'whatever it takes' approach dominate Israel's feelings towards Iran. Iran is represented as a war-hungry, animalistic terror regime that has infiltrated Syria and Lebanon, while Israel is presented as reasonable, measured and morally superior. In 2015, Netanyahu states that attempts to tame Iran by including it in international agreements, such as the JCPOA, only serve to potentially exacerbate the threat Iran poses to Israel and to stability in the region. Netanyahu expresses the status-confirming emotion of pride in Israel's capability to defend itself and moral authority in his belief in the righteousness of this foreign policy, tying this capability to the powerlessness European Jews had to face during the Holocaust. In the following years, Netanyahu's rhetoric shifts towards constructing a narrative of the in- versus out-group in which Iran as a sponsor of terror threatens the stability of the entire world order. Israel clearly perceives a vital threat of victimization emanating from Iran and its proxies, placing it in line with historical Jewish suffering and accusing the international community of lack of interest in protecting Jews. Militant Islam is used here as an umbrella term to emotionalize the audience into perceiving the different conflicts in the Middle East as all being rooted in extremist Muslim beliefs. This ultimately serves to divert attention from the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the Palestinian struggle for statehood. It also plays on the fear of Europe and the US of the terror threat of ISIS, which reached its peak in late 2015 and early 2016 after the concerted terror attacks in Paris in December 2015. The notion of fate plays a role in all three speeches: implicitly in the representation of Israel's victimhood in the face of Iran as the new Nazi-Germany in 2015 and in the bible quote of 2017, and explicitly ('fateful battle') in 2016. Hereby, Iran is emotionally coded within the narrative of Jewish victimization throughout history and Israel represented as the place in which the Jews can finally protect themselves from historical victimization. Resilience and the ability to defend itself seem to be important markers of Israel's identity as a victim of Iran's aggression. Israel identifies itself as

morally superior and righteous, which is argumentatively based on its victimhood experience, calling upon the UN to follow Israel's lead.

c) The role of Judaism and Jewish History for Israel's Identity

Religious and historical references to Judaism and the Jewish people are important sources for the analysis of Israel's state-identity. As discussed in Chapter 4, Judaism as a religion contains emotional narratives of suffering and victimhood. Historical and biblical allusions have already been encountered in the previous sections of the analysis and their recurrence throughout all speeches warrants some further examination. This section elaborates on the religious and historical narratives that Netanyahu invokes to substantiate his arguments.

*'In antiquity, we faced destruction from the ancient empires of Babylon and Rome. In the Middle Ages, we faced inquisition and expulsion. And In modern times, we faced pogroms and the Holocaust [repetitive negative emotional representation of violent past emphasizing historical continuity]. [...] Yet the empires of Babylon and Rome are not represented in this hall of nations. Neither is the Thousand Year Reich. Those seemingly invincible empires are long gone. But Israel lives. The people of Israel live [emotional expression of pride in resilience]. ' עם ישראל חי. (2015)*

The historical narrative of perpetual Jewish suffering is used here to emphasize the resilience of the Jewish people that resulted in the foundation of the State of Israel. In both the biblical and historical reference, Israel is presented not so much as a nation state but a mythological or sentimental place, while Iran is framed as one of many antagonists that have attempted, but ultimately failed, to extinguish the Jewish people. Representing the state within a 4.000-year narrative history of antagonism and persecution elevates the existence of Israel today onto a mythical level. This is further emphasized by the Hebrew phrase repeating the English statement in the last sentence. Netanyahu also aligns the Jewish people and Jewish history with the history of the State of Israel. It is both telling of his understanding of Israel as the Jewish state, emotionally coded with pride in the resilience of Jews, and can be understood as an emotionalizing strategy meant to evoke sympathy in the audience for Israel's present-day demeanor.

The following paragraph, also from the 2015 speech, highlights Netanyahu's understanding of the State of Israel in relation to Jewish history:



*'The re-birth of Israel [emotional representation of historical continuity] is a testament to the indomitable spirit of my people [positive emotional expression of belonging]. For a hundred generations, the Jewish people dreamed of returning to the Land of Israel [acknowledgement of conscious feeling state]. [...] even in our darkest hours we never gave up hope of rebuilding our eternal capital Jerusalem [acknowledgement of conscious feeling state].'*

Netanyahu emphasizes the historical continuity from biblical Israel to the present-day state with the reference to *L'Shana Haba'ah*, the prayer of the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem. This prayer is usually uttered during Passover and Yom Kippur celebrations and its religious purpose is to serve as a reminder of the shared experience of living in the Diaspora; it is not, however, generally understood as a political project (Berg 2012, 11). Zionism, which arose in Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century, identified the existence in the Diaspora as the source of the Jews' problems and, as a consequence, called for the reassessment of the prayer as a nationalist political project (ibid., 12). This is important to know, because Netanyahu here presents the foundation of the State of Israel as an aim that has united the Jewish people for 'a hundred generations'. In reality, returning to Jerusalem is not understood as a political aim by the majority of Jews across the world, it is rather only interpreted as such by the small group of religious Zionists whom Netanyahu ideologically and politically belongs to. He is not lying to his audience here, however he is misrepresenting the reality, claiming to speak for the entirety of the Jewish people, while omitting the differences between the Zionist and the Jewish interpretation of the prayer. For the analysis, this sentence is indicative of Netanyahu's self-entitlement to speak as an embodiment of the state. That he is able to utter this sentence without raising opposition signifies how much identity discourses in Israel have been shaped by the religious-nationalist Zionist ideology of Netanyahu and his party colleagues.

Israel also continuously represents Judaism as peaceful, prosperous and enlightened – in contrast to barbaric militant Islam. As already discussed in 6.2 b), in 2017, Netanyahu states 'The light of Israel will never be extinguished. נֹצֵחַ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִשְׁקַר'. This quote is not only a biblical reference but contains the metaphor of light, commonly referencing cognitive processes of the mind, illumination or enlightenment (Boyle 2009, 99). Israel is represented here both as a mythological place, or a state of mind, which cannot be eradicated, and literally as enlightened, ergo morally superior, and

aligned with Western principles. In 2015, Netanyahu also appeals to the audience to understand Israel as a defender of international norms and values:

*'In a region plagued by violence and by unimaginable intolerance [negative emotional representation], in which Islamic fanatics are destroying the ancient treasures of civilization [negative emotional coding of Islam as source of violence], Israel stands out as a towering beacon of enlightenment and tolerance [repeated expressions of pride; emotional representation of Judaism as peaceful; positive coding of alignment with Western principles].'* (2015)

Jewish identity, and accordingly, Israel's identity, is represented as a peaceful ally of the West in a barbaric, dangerous place dominated by the malicious forces of Islam. Israel also expresses its respect for history and historic artifacts, while denying Islam the capability of respecting norms and civilization. Israel's identity seems almost like it is significantly constructed in relation to its Muslim neighborhood, because of the intensity with which the perceived differences between Israel and the other regional players is underlined.

*'But throughout our history, the Jewish people have learned the heavy price of silence [emotional expression of moral superiority through experience of suffering]. And as the Prime Minister of the Jewish State, as someone who knows that history, I refuse to be silent [assigning moral authority to speaker]. I'll say it again: The days when the Jewish people remained passive in the face of genocidal enemies [negative emotional coding; historical analogy to Holocaust] - those days are over. Not being passive means speaking up about those dangers [positive coding of agency; moral superiority]. We have. We are. We will [prideful positive emotional representation of self as responsible].'* (2015)

This paragraph highlights that Israel's identity is heavily based on the historical persecution of the Jewish people which serves as a justification for taking action against any form of perceived injustice. Hereby Netanyahu ascribes to Israel the unique ability to judge and understand what is bad and what is good, indicating moral supremacy that cannot be contested by another state represented in the UN General Assembly. Netanyahu mobilizes history, and specifically the historical narrative of the persecuted and resilient minority, in order to explain Israel's world view and potentially convince some audience members of the righteousness of his black-and-white understanding of international relations. In this understanding, Israel is part of the enlightened, polite international community while Iran and militant Islam threaten this community and, first and foremost, Israel, as the home of the Jewish people. In

2017, Israel presents itself as the only solution to the persecution of Jews around the world:

*‘A hundred and twenty years ago, Theodor Herzl convened the First Zionist Congress to transform our tragic past into a brilliant future [conscious emotional qualification through contrast of past and future] by establishing the Jewish state [emotionally represented as only solution for positive future]. One hundred years ago, the Balfour Declaration advanced Herzl’s vision by recognizing the right of the Jewish people to a national home [positive emotional coding of nationalist project] in our ancestral homeland [positive framing of historical claim to land].’ (2017)*

The state identity that is invoked here is based in the narrative of suffering, persecution and victimhood of Diaspora Jews. According to Netanyahu, Israel is the only place which protects Jews from being victimized, and this fact justifies any means necessary to maintain the power and integrity of this state. Israel as the ancestral homeland is, again, mystically charged, implying that the piece of land had to serve as the territory for establishing said state – again justifying the means with which the land was populated.

Ironically, in the 2016 speech, Israel accuses Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas of the exact kind of mobilization of history and historical narratives for his political aims that Netanyahu has practiced in 2015:

*‘President Abbas just attacked from this podium the Balfour Declaration. He’s preparing a lawsuit against Britain for that declaration from 1917. That’s almost 100 years ago – talk about being stuck in the past [negative emotional coding of Abbas; sarcasm to emphasize absurdity]. The Palestinians may just as well sue Iran for the Cyrus Declaration, which enabled the Jews to rebuild our Temple in Jerusalem 2,500 years ago. [...]’ (2016)*

This paragraph eloquently displays the intractability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel and Palestine are competing for recognition of their victimhood and their right to the contested territory (Greene et al 2017). One history is played against the other here with Netanyahu effectively expressing that the Jews have the right to the land because they were there first. However, Netanyahu neglects that the Balfour Declaration was issued at a time in which the nation-state as a concept existed, in the international political world order as it is familiar to us today. The Cyrus Declaration, on the other hand, has an entirely different historical context which is hardly

applicable to the norms of international politics that have developed over the past century. This lack of recognition of the changed circumstances indicates a specific understanding of time and history centered around the history of the Jewish people. As is often the case within competitive victimhood discourses, one party refuses to acknowledge the suffering of the other, as that would create empathy and humanize the opponent. Through sarcasm, Netanyahu is looking to ridicule Abbas' attempt to litigate history; at the same time, he himself is heavily involved in making demands based on history.

Religious and historical references appeal to shared culture and community and a lot can be gleaned from their occurrence. The historical and biblical references signify that Israel's state identity is rooted in Jewish liturgy and history and its worldview is highly influenced by the narrative of perpetual Jewish suffering that led to the foundation of the state and to the mainstreaming of Zionism in Israeli public discourse. Israel perceives itself as surrounded by enemies seeking its destruction as there have always been enemies seeking the destruction of the Jewish people, but none ever succeeded, a narrative of fate and resilience. Eventually, this world view justifies the means with which Israel protects itself from these enemies – Israel is trying to convey this perspective to the audience, seeking recognition and understanding, and even alliance with the international community.

## 7. Conclusion

The analysis shows that Israel's identity and world view are expressed in the emotional connotations and codes underlying the speeches. By focusing on two different constituents that are addressed in Netanyahu's speeches, the UN and UN bodies and Iran and militant Islam, the research demonstrates that narratives of victimhood structure Israel's self-ascribed identity. However, the experiences and perspectives with these two constituents differ in their emotional connotation: While Israel accuses the UN of ideologically unfair treatment and lack of recognition for its achievements, Iran is identified as a real threat and vital enemy against which Israel has to defend itself.

The emotions that underlie Netanyahu's assessment of Israel's relationship to the UN are anger, annoyance and frustration, as expressed through sarcasm and mockery

and explanation of how different UN bodies have treated Israel unfairly. The main point of contention here seems to be the lack of recognition and the perceived misunderstanding of Israel, which sees itself as a member of the 'polite' international community is tired of being treated like a 'bad' country. To emphasize this point, Netanyahu frequently compared Israel's achievements with the human rights violations perpetrated in other countries in the Middle East, specifically Syria and Iran. While there are references to Israel as the Jewish state and accusations of antisemitism towards the UN, Israel refrains from making liturgical and historical arguments in order to emphasize its righteousness – rather focusing on communicating Israel's identity as an innovative, equal and democratic nation-state in order to gain recognition among its peers.

Regarding Iran, Israel voices an entirely different emotional narrative of resilience in the face of a fanatic enemy. Iran, and militant Islam, are frequently connotated as terroristic, animalistic and barbaric – in contrast to the modern and benevolent Israel. Netanyahu seems to experience Iran's aggression towards Israel as a vital threat, emphasizing the genocidal aims of the Islamic Republic. The invoking of fate, of religious metaphors and quotes emphasizes the highly emotionalized relationship Israel has towards Iran. Iran is framed as one of the many enemies the Jewish people had to overcome in their long history of suffering and persecution. Israel expresses pride in its resilience and ability to defend itself against Iran's aggression and emphasizes its moral superiority as an experienced victim of injustice with a supreme understanding of good and evil.

The third theme of the analysis, the interpretation of Israel's history as an extension of Jewish history, sheds further light on how much Israel's identity is rooted in a narrative of victimhood and suffering. These narrative threads create relationships between past and present and decontextualize the events, emphasizing the primordial biblical right of the Jewish people to settle in the land of Israel. Undoubtedly, Netanyahu perceives Israel as the ultimate outcome of a 4.000-year history of the Jewish people. The highly emotionalized use of religious symbolism, emphasis on fate and the pride in the resilience of the Jewish people and Israel elevate Israel onto a mythological level as the remedy of Jewish victimhood. These narratives are used to justify any means necessary in order to maintain the integrity of the state, and place Israel beyond the worldly level of the international community.

This thesis began with a quote that emphasized the dual position of Israel as represented by its Prime Minister Netanyahu: According to him, Israel is a nation-state and member of the international community, and it is also the safe haven for a perpetually persecuted people that have returned to their promised land to find peace. In the speeches at the UNGA, Netanyahu again expresses a dual identity for Israel. The analysis shows that Israel claims rights and freedoms in the self-defense against its enemies based on the Jews' historical victimhood, exempting itself from the norms and rules of the international order, while expressing dissatisfaction with the perceived unfair treatment of Israel within the bureaucratic international system. Netanyahu's references to Jewish liturgy and history indicate that Jewish suffering, turned into victimhood, became a moral posture and identity-enhancing narrative for the state of Israel (Benbassa 2010). Without the academic assessment of the emotional codes underpinning this representation, these two dimensions of Israel's victimhood, one rooted in misrecognition and one rooted in perpetual Jewish suffering, could not have been identified properly.

This thesis demonstrates that within a constructivist framework, operationalizing emotions contributes to a better understanding of how a state's identity shapes its behavior and orders its relationships and world views (Hoondert et al. 2019). The theoretical framework allows for treating the speeches of a political representative, or agent, as telling about a state's self-understanding, the structure in which the agent arises. Nevertheless, constructivism also emphasizes the power of the agent to shape the structures in which they act. It is important to point out that Prime Minister Netanyahu represents a very specific understanding of Israel, one that is rooted more strongly in religious narratives than that of secular Israelis, and he does not represent the full range of the victimhood- and identity discourses within contemporary Israel. However, as long-term Prime Minister, Netanyahu has significantly contributed to shaping Israel's position and perception in the international arena and its foreign relations to other states. Therefore, while on a domestic level, Israel's identity discourses may be more diverse and nuanced, Netanyahu's personal emotions and convictions, representing one identity discourse within Israel, are perceived as representative of the entirety of the state. In order to further our understanding of the relationship of agents and structures within this conception of state identities and

emotions, a comparative analysis of Israeli Prime Ministers and their tendencies to invoke victimhood narratives in their representation of Israel in front of the UNGA would be useful. Additionally, the relationship between a victim-based state identity and narratives of self-defense might warrant a comparative case study between multiple states.

Constructivism and emotions research in IR lend themselves as theoretical perspectives on matters of state identity because they emphasize the sociocultural dimension of emotions within International Relations. Emotions put into words the experience of feelings and shape the web that connects societies and decoding them contributes to a more nuanced assessment of state behavior and state identity. As this thesis shows, Israel draws on emotionalized narratives of victimhood and resilience in order to express and explain its world view to other states represented at the UN General Assembly. It demonstrates that state identity, in this case victimhood, can be identified via the analysis of emotional codes and representations used by political figures.

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